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ABSTRACT

The guidelines presented in this document are intended as a learning tool to assist preparers of education communications and products in creating sex-fair communications and eliminating sex bias. Presented with examples of sex-biased and sex-fair uses and the rationale for use, guidelines are given for the following categories: (1) language: generic he/generic she, universal "man," "man" first, inconsistency, derogatory or demeaning usage; (2) omissions: equal representation, lost opportunity, disregard of problem identified; (3) roles and traits: family/parenting, occupational roles and career preparation, historical/biographical, emotional and character traits, physical attributes/personal appearance; and (4) graphics/audio visual: numerical imbalance, stereotyped portrayal, derogatory portrayal, sex segregation. A checklist to ensure sex fair communications is provided which lists each of the categories. (TA)

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national advisory council on women's educational programs

1832 M St., N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20036
(202) 653-5848

GUIDELINES

TO ENSURE SEX FAIRNESS

IN

EDUCATION DIVISION COMMUNICATIONS AND PRODUCTS

Prepared by

Women on Words and Images, Inc.

for

THE NATIONAL ADVISORY COUNCIL,

ON

WOMEN'S EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

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CONTENTS

Page

INTRODUCTION..... i

USING THE GUIDELINES AND CHECKLIST..... ii

LANGUAGE..... 1

1. Generic He/Generic She..... 1
2. Universal "Man"..... 2
3. "Man" First..... 2
4. Inconsistency..... 2
5. Derogatory and Demeaning Usage..... 3

OMISSIONS..... 4

1. Equal Representation..... 4
2. Lost Opportunity..... 4
3. Disregard of Problem Identified..... 5

ROLES AND TRAITS..... 6

1. Family/Parenting..... 6
2. Occupational Roles and Career Preparation..... 6
3. Historical/Biographical..... 7
4. Emotional and Character Traits..... 7
5. Physical Attributes and Personal Appearance..... 8

GRAPHICS/AUDIO-VISUAL..... 9

1. Numerical Imbalance..... 9
2. Stereotyped Portrayal..... 9
3. Derogatory Portrayal..... 9
4. Sex Segregation..... 9

CHECKLIST TO ENSURE SEX FAIR COMMUNICATIONS..... 10

FOOTNOTES..... 11

INTRODUCTION

Sexism, or sex bias, is defined by the National Council of Teachers of English as "words or actions that arbitrarily assign roles or characteristics to people on the basis of sex. Originally used to refer to practices that discriminated against women, the term now includes any usage that unfairly delimits the aspirations or attributes of either sex."1

In communications, sex bias can be manifested in language patterns, in the exclusion or omission of females and their concerns, and in the sexist portrayal of roles and traits for both men and women. Sex fair communications, on the other hand, do not assign roles or characteristics on the basis of a person's being female or male. Sex fair communications have the potential of opening rather than limiting possibilities for men and women.

With this understanding, the importance of creating sex fair communications and eliminating the subtle tyranny of sex bias becomes more urgent. The Guidelines that follow will help you reject sexist content, internalize sex fair values and communicate without bias.

USING THE GUIDELINES AND CHECKLIST

Before beginning the actual creation of a communication, study these Guidelines. They are intended as a learning tool to assist you in preparing sex fair communications and becoming proficient at creating such materials automatically. Become familiar with the Guidelines. Refer to them while your work is in progress.

When you have finished, use the Checklist to ensure that you have covered all the categories and that your communication is sex fair. Columns have been provided to check off each category once you have decided that the material has followed the letter and the spirit of the Guidelines. Space is provided at the head of the columns for the date and the title of your product.

LANGUAGE

The language we use influences our perception of reality and reflects the structure of our society. One means of changing and improving the perceptions we have of ourselves and of others is to expunge biased terminology from all communications.

1. GENERIC HE/GENERIC SHE

GUIDELINE — Use language that encompasses both sexes:

1. Use he and she, her and his.
2. Use nongender referents you, student and person.
3. Use plurals they, students and people.
4. Use articles rather than personal pronouns a, an, the.
5. Use passive voice for verbs. (This should be used sparingly.)
6. Omit pronouns.

SEX BIASED — "This set consists of the three variables that pertain to the expectations and aspirations that a student and his parents have for his schooling..."2

SEX FAIR — This set consists of the three variables that pertain to the expectations and aspirations that students and their parents have for schooling...

SEX BIASED — "The person who cannot read places himself in a lesser orbit of the stream of life. He will go to great lengths to hide the inability to read."3

SEX FAIR — The person who cannot read is placed in a lesser orbit of the stream of life. He or she will go to great lengths to hide the inability to read.

SEX BIASED — An illustration of a male teacher is accompanied by the following caption: "Teacher can encourage the children to express themselves in words by talking about her own feelings and experiences."4

SEX FAIR — The above quotation is sex biased because of the use of generic she for teacher. This is an opportunity to use he or she.

RATIONALE — To use the generic he with certain referents (e.g. worker) and the generic she for others (e.g. teacher) is exclusionary. It perpetuates sex stereotyping and thus encourages biased attitudes.

2. UNIVERSAL "MAN"

GUIDELINE Use a universal or neutral term instead of man.

SEX BIASED "Cooking of food was discovered accidentally by cavemen."5

SEX FAIR Cooking of food was discovered accidentally by cave dwellers.

SEX BIASED "A Manual for Budgeting and Accounting for Manpower Resources in Postsecondary Education."

SEX FAIR A Manual for Budgeting and Accounting for Human Resources in Postsecondary Education.

RATIONALE In the English language the word man has come to have two meanings: "adult male" and "human being." The effect of this usage is to exclude or overlook women.

3. "MAN" FIRST

GUIDELINE Interchange the use of men and women, he and she with women and men, she and he. Do not maintain the female first only when the reference is to a stereotypical female occupation.

SEX BIASED When communications refer to both sexes, the terms he or she, men and women, boys and girls are commonly used.

RATIONALE Varied use of female and male primary references offers a more egalitarian approach to communications.

4. INCONSISTENCY

GUIDELINE To avoid inconsistency, be rigorous in your attention to language. A disclaimer that he means he or she should not be made.

SEX BIASED "Any initial frustration is more than offset by his progress as he or she becomes more self-assured..."7

SEX FAIR Any initial frustration is more than offset by the child's progress as he or she becomes more self-assured...

or

Any initial frustration is more than offset by their progress as they become more self-assured...

RATIONALE The terminology of a communication, whether oral or written, may begin with equal treatment of the sexes, then slip into sexist phraseology or predictable stereotypes.

5. DEROGATORY AND DEMEANING USAGE

GUIDELINE — Do not use derogatory and demeaning references, they are unacceptable.

SEX BIASED — After giving some examples of how some vocational educational materials treat the subject of women, a speaker stated, "Getting back to a more serious vein ..." and went on to talk about the problems, challenges, and opportunities now facing vocational education or looming on the horizon. 8

SEX FAIR — The remark implying that sex equality is not a serious concern should have been eliminated. Including sex discrimination as a problem, challenge and opportunity in vocational education would ensure that this communication is sex fair.

RATIONALE — Characterizing females as silly, vain and flighty is erroneous and belittling. These traits can apply to many people at different times and should not be stereotypically assigned to females.

OMISSIONS

Omitting discussion of women's activities and achievements from communications shortchanges everyone. Females constitute over half the population, and information about their contributions and expertise should be given so that people of both sexes can benefit. Inclusion of women in every aspect of education promotes sex equality.

1. EQUAL REPRESENTATION

GUIDELINE — Represent girls and women in equal numbers to boys and men in all situations, including subject matter, illustrations, quotation, bibliographic sources, participants, data analyses, speakers, voices on audio-visual materials, and dissemination strategies.

SEX BIASED — A speech contained the following quotes: "Will Rogers once said..." "And Edmund Burke tells us..." "Thomas Henry Huxley once said..." "... from Elbert Hubbard."[9]

SEX FAIR — It is important to use quotations from women as well.

RATIONALE — Women and girls represent over half the population. Their contributions, activities and achievements must be made visible. Token representation is not sufficient to dismiss this obligation.

2. LOST OPPORTUNITY

GUIDELINE — Whatever the concern of the communication-- whether program information, ethnicity, or <u>any</u> other topic-- create the opportunity to deal with sex bias and issues relating to the changing roles of females and males.

SEX BIASED — A resource book describing 155 exemplary educational programs developed by local school districts with the aid of Federal funds totally ignores the issues of sex bias and sex stereotyping.[10]

SEX FAIR — The compilation of exemplary programs should have included programs which deal with the issue of sex bias if, indeed, some of the programs did deal with this issue. A description of the relevant activities should have been included.

RATIONALE — The subjects of sex bias and the changing roles of males and females are usually ignored. Confronting these issues would improve and complete the communication as well as promote sex fairness.

3. DISREGARD OF PROBLEM IDENTIFIED

GUIDELINE — Whenever situations or differences between the sexes are acknowledged, treat the identified problem thoroughly. In addition, the subjects of women and racial/ethnic minorities should be treated separately.

SEX BIASED — A report of educational progress states,"... males and females at age 9 show scholastic understanding that is fairly equal. By age 13, however, females have begun a decline in achievement which continues downward through age 17 and into adulthood."11 Although the report recommends thirty areas for further research, the area of declining female achievement is not included.

SEX FAIR — Because the decline in the test scores of females was identified as a problem, a recommendation should have been made to investigate the causes.

SEX BIASED — The following statement was made about educational equity research and development programs: "Equality of educational opportunity is denied many students because of their language or ethnic background, sex, or economic status." The report then describes support for projects such as "improving teacher practices and curricular materials for culturally and linguistically different students, and determining how educational programs for high school students can be made sensitive to cultural-linguistic differences in style of learning and expression."12

SEX FAIR — Since denial of equal educational opportunity because of sex is recognized as a problem, the report should discuss activities and funding required to alleviate it.

RATIONALE — The issue of equal educational opportunity for females is often identified but rarely treated in detail. Frequently, after an initial reference to the issue, it is glossed over or ignored entirely. Furthermore, although some aspects of the problems facing women are also relevant to minorities, they are distinct problems with their own solutions. Even if they are mentioned together, they should be dealt with separately.

ROLES AND TRAITS

Stereotypical roles and traits are often assigned on the basis of sex. This restriction is stultifying to both females and males. It is necessary to provide particular encouragement and support to those who depart from traditional sex roles. Making varied role models more visible will also assist in achieving sex fairness.

1. FAMILY/PARENTING

GUIDELINE — When portraying family and parenting roles in any context, assign examples of males and females to every aspect of each role. Include examples which have been considered nontraditional, so that both sexes are shown with a wide range of options.

SEX BIASED — "For example, mother or an older sister who works might spend the night at the Demitri home with a younger baby-sitter."[13]

SEX FAIR — "Mother or father," "older sister or brother" could easily be substituted to make this communication sex fair. The stereotypical assumption that females are the only ones available to baby-sit is invalid.

RATIONALE — It is often assumed that women are solely responsible for the care of the home and children and that men are the "breadwinners." These stereotypes are confining and inequitable. Nontraditional role models illustrate and encourage a wider range of options.

2. OCCUPATIONAL ROLES AND CAREER PREPARATION

GUIDELINE — Depict a wide variety of occupations for both sexes, paying particular attention to nontraditional representations. In materials referring to students and career preparation, represent all careers as appropriate to either sex.

SEX BIASED — "Girls begin to consider the retailing possibilities for the items they make in sewing classes. Boys begin to understand that a good deal of mathematics is required to sell cars or houses."[14]

SEX FAIR — Boys and girls begin to consider the retailing possibilities for the items they make in sewing classes. They also begin to understand that a good deal of mathematics is required to sell cars or houses.

RATIONALE — Men and women today work in an ever-widening variety of jobs. To ignore this reality perpetuates the myth that certain occupations are suited to only one sex. Girls and boys both must be prepared to work in their adult lives, and both need options, guidance and encouragement to choose fields of work and study that best suit their interests, qualifications and ability.

3. HISTORICAL/BIOGRAPHICAL

GUIDELINE — Acknowledge the presence, activities and accomplishments of women in history by including them in all historical references. The goal is an equal citation of males and females in historical/biographical references.

SEX BIASED — The activities and accomplishments of seven men were depicted in a magazine over the course of a year. There were no comparable stories about women.15

SEX FAIR — Search out historical/biographical information about the activities and achievements of females. Make every effort to include women in all communications.

RATIONALE — History has been distorted by the almost total exclusion of half the people. Information on women's roles in history is available today. Using it will result in a more comprehensive and sex fair presentation.

4. EMOTIONAL AND CHARACTER TRAITS

GUIDELINE — Assign a variety and balance of emotional and character traits to both sexes. Negative and positive traits should be presented as appropriate for the situation rather than the sex.

SEX BIASED — "He also believes that if he tries to get ahead he will not encounter obstacles, and that with a good education he will have no difficulty getting a job. He would not sacrifice everything to get ahead, and would not want to change himself."16

SEX FAIR — The inclusion of females in this description of character traits and aspirations would promote a sex fair communication.

RATIONALE — Human beings are capable of a wide range of desirable and undesirable emotional and character traits. Stereotypical thinking leads to differential labeling of traits for each sex, e.g., "aggressive" for males, "pushy" for females. Certain traits have been considered acceptable for one sex and unacceptable for the other.

5. PHYSICAL ATTRIBUTES AND PERSONAL APPEARANCE

GUIDELINE — Describe the physical attributes and personal appearance of males and females without judgments about what is "proper".

SEX BIASED — "The impression projected to the community by the medical assistant should be that of a poised professional person. 1) Her make-up should convey an impression of natural good looks. Make-up should be used with taste and discretion."[17]

SEX FAIR — The impression projected to the community by the medical assistant should be that of a capable professional person. 1) He or she should present a neat appearance.

RATIONALE — Society assigns certain physical characteristics as proper to each sex, and people who do not fit accepted patterns are stigmatized by this stereotyping. Females are frequently described in terms of their physical appearance, while males are described in terms of their accomplishments or character

GRAPHICS/AUDIO-VISUAL

Graphics often give the first impression of the material, setting the stage for the accompanying text. Thus, they may have a powerful influence. Graphics offer an opportunity to illustrate role reversal and to break out of the stereotypical portrayal.

1. NUMERICAL IMBALANCE

GUIDELINE — Make sure that the number of illustrations in a publication or an audio-visual presentation are balanced between the sexes.

RATIONALE — The graphics of a written or audio-visual communication will be relevant and fair only if they include both sexes.

2. STEREOTYPED PORTRAYAL

GUIDELINE — Depict a variety of roles, traits and activities for each sex. Show role reversal and non-traditional representations.

RATIONALE — People of both sexes exhibit a wide range of roles, traits and activities. The graphics will be more relevant if this range is indicated. Exclusive use of traditional stereotypes is unrealistic and discriminatory. It reduces the acceptability of the communications.

3. DEROGATORY PORTRAYAL

GUIDELINE — Avoid cartoons and illustrations which are demeaning.

RATIONALE — It is unacceptable to demean racial/ethnic minorities, and it is equally unacceptable to demean females. It is unnecessary to insult anyone to make a point.

4. SEX SEGREGATION

GUIDELINE — Represent both sexes in illustrations. Wherever possible, assure that portrayals of groups include both females and males.

RATIONALE — Segregation of groups by sex limits relationships, perpetuates differences, promotes isolation and creates distorted views of what is permissible.

NOTE: The Guidelines in all of the other sections, "Language," "Omissions," and "Roles & Traits" are also relevant to the creation of sex fair graphics. It is important that you utilize those sections as well as this "Graphics/Audio-Visual" section in preparing your communications.

CHECKLIST TO ENSURE SEX FAIR COMMUNICATIONS

	Date: Product:	Date: Product:	Date: Product:	Date: Product:	Date: Product:	Date: Product:	Date: Product:	Date: Product:
LANGUAGE								
Generic he/ generic she								
Universal "man"								
"Man" first								
Inconsistency								
Derogatory or demeaning usage								
OMISSIONS								
Equal representation								
Lost opportunity								
Disregard of problem identified								
ROLES AND TRAITS								
Family/ parenting								
Occupational roles and career preparation								
Historical/ biographical								
Emotional and character traits								
Physical attributes/ personal appearance								
GRAPHICS/AV								
Numerical imbalance								
Stereotyped portrayal								
Derogatory portrayal								
Sex segregation								

FOOTNOTES

[1] Aleen P. Nilsen et al., Sexism and Language (Urbana, Ill.: National Council of Teachers of English, 1977), p. 182.

[2] George Mayeske, Tetsua Okada & Albert Beaton, Jr. A Study of the Attitude Toward Life of Our Nation's Students, Department of Health, Education and Welfare; Office of Education; Office of Planning, Budgeting and Evaluation (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1973), p. 84.

[3] U.S. Office of Education, Right to Read Program, Literacy--A Must for All (brochure).

[4] Lois B. Murphy and Ethel Leeper, Language is for Communication, Department of Health, Education and Welfare; Office of Human Development; Office of Child Development (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1976), p. 13

[5] Alfred Clayton & John Almony, Menu Cycles (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers, The State University, Curriculum Labs, June 1975).

[6] O. Jean Brandes, Projects Products and Services of the National Center for Education Statistics, 1976 (Washington: U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, NCES, 1976), p. 86.

[7] Office of Human Development, Office of Child Development, Project Head Start, Handicapped Children in Head Start Programs (brochures)(1974).

[8] T.H. Bell, "New Outlooks for Vocational Education," Speech delivered May 7, 1976, p. 7.

[9] T.H. Bell, "The Functional Characteristics of An Educated Person," Speech delivered January 12, 1975.

[10] Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development, Educational Programs that Work, USOE Contract #300-75-0402, 1976.

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13 Exploring Careers in Child Care, Grant from Ohio Department of Education, Division of Vocational Education (Bloomington, Ill.: McKnight Publishing Co., 1974).

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16 George Mayeske, Tetsuo Okada & Albert Beaton, Jr., A Study of the Attitude Toward Life on Our Nation's Students, Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Office of Education, Office of Planning, Budgeting and Evaluation, 1973, p. 14.

17 Mildren Jaeger, Medical Assistant Curriculum, N.J. Curriculum Laboratory (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers--The State University, 1976).